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What are we **learning about...?**

Community leadership in networks

Creating community links

A development tool designed to explore the rationale for linking schools and communities beyond the school gates within a networked context.

Community Leadership Strategy

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other

learning with each other

learning on behalf of each other

Acknowledgements

This tool has been designed by Professors Kathryn Riley and Karen Louis with thanks to: colleagues from the Thomas Tallis School Community, Greenwich; the Institute of Education, London; the headteachers from schools serving the Ocean Estate; staff involved in the New Deal for Communities and Local Authority staff in Tower Hamlets.

We would also like to thank Winsford Networked Learning Community for their contributions to the development of this tool.

**Kate Bond and Maggie Farrar,
Lead Developers**

Creating community links

This development tool is designed to explore the rationale for linking schools and communities within a networked context. It has been found to be particularly useful when used by schools and networks to agree on their values before engaging in community leadership activities.

The tool has been developed by Professors Kathryn Riley and Karen Louis, both from their work with schools and communities and from an extensive literature review. This activity has been used successfully with a range of network and community participants to enable them to discuss and agree why schools and communities should be more closely linked.

We believe this tool is most useful to schools and networks of schools, in engaging their staff, governors and members of their wider community in discussion about why schools and communities should work together. Education practitioners may find it particularly useful to use this tool before embarking on further community engagement activities, in order that all those involved are able to develop a shared understanding of the reasons and rationale for committing time, energy and resources to this work.

This activity is appropriate for all adults involved in the work of schools, networks of schools and their wider communities. It can be used with one school and its community, or across a network of schools and other organisations. Any number of people can be involved.

Creating community links

Activity guidance

Resources

Each group will need:

- one envelope with a full set of statement cards in per group
- one large piece of paper per group (eg flipchart paper)
- one adhesive glue stick per group
- one large felt pen per group

In addition, one example of a 'Diamond 9' drawn onto flipcharts around the room

Organise...

- Organise participants to sit in groups of between three and six. Ensure that groups are not bigger than this, or the activity will *not* work.
- You may wish to think about who is in each group to ensure balance and positive group dynamics.
- Provide each group with a set of resources. See resources list above.

Facilitate...

The facilitator of this activity should:

- prepare the resources and set up the room in advance
- think about who will be in each group and why
- explain the whole process to participants before they start the activity
- keep track of the time and remind participants when they should complete each part of the activity
- move between the groups, checking to ensure they understand the task, and listening to the conversations for interesting points
- plan how to collate the results and feed these back to the whole group

Introduce...



5 mins

Explain that this will be an interactive session and that this activity is an opportunity to discuss and agree on core values – what matters to you? Explain that each group has been given a set of cards and that on each card is a statement about why schools and communities should be more closely linked. You may also wish to provide each participant with a full list of the statements at the end of the session (see page 9).

Choose... the important statement



20 mins

Explain that participants will work in groups to agree, from within their own context, which are the most important reasons why schools and communities should be more closely linked.

Each group should then choose the nine cards which they all agree are the most important reasons why schools and communities should be more closely linked.

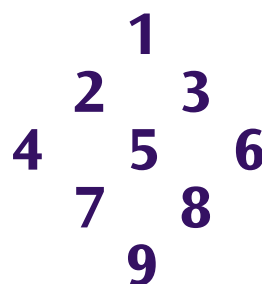
Prioritise... the statements



20 mins

Once the group has agreed on the nine most important cards, explain that the next step is to prioritise these cards. Using the flipchart, introduce the 'Diamond 9' formation as the method for prioritising. Indicate that once the groups have decided on the order for their cards, and agreed on this as a group, they will need to glue the cards down on the paper provided and hand them in.

Diamond 9 ranking



Put the most important card at the top of the diamond, and the least important card at the bottom. Then, rank the second most important cards by placing them on the second row, and so on.

Plenary



20 mins

- This is an important aspect of the activity as participants need to get a sense of what statements other groups selected and how they ranked them.
- It is useful to provide participants with an opportunity to go around the room and look at other groups' diamonds, to see which statements other people thought were important.
- Following this with a whole group plenary is also useful in providing an opportunity to share ideas in a wider public forum.
- With a small number of groups (eg less than 12 groups) you could ask each group to call out the statement which they chose to rank as number one, and to explain the reasons for their choice.
- Creating a tally chart to record the results can be a good way to find out if there are any patterns in participants' choices.
- With larger groups you may need to collect in all the diamond ranked statements to create a graph or tally chart for the whole group. In this case, you will need to plan and outline how you will feed back to the group after the session (eg through a newsletter, or at your next event/meeting).
- Whatever you do, you need to note down any issues, points of agreement and questions which participants might wish to address as your community leadership work progresses, and then plan to follow them up. □

Creating community links activity

Statement card template

Photocopy these pages and cut out the cards.

1

Children learn to become more responsible adults.

2

Teachers understand more about where children come from and what motivates children.

3

The curriculum will be more relevant for pupils.

4

Teachers and parents can work together more closely and help pupils to achieve.

5

Schools will be accountable to their local community.

6

Local people can have more of a say in important decisions about their schools.

7

Schools can come together to plan for what they want for children.

8

Young people have more opportunities to be involved in decisions about their lives.

9

Children have a sense of belonging in their community.

10

Vandalism and anti-social behaviour among young people are reduced.

11

The local area is safer, healthier and more attractive.

12

Adults as well as children are encouraged to learn.

13

Parents will feel included in their child's education.

14

Schools can work together to tackle racism and other forms of discrimination.

15

Business, education and community leaders will have more chances to work together for the benefit of young people.

16

Schools can do more to prepare new immigrant groups to take part in society.

Creating community links activity

Statement card template Photocopy these pages and cut out the cards.

17

Schools can agree on fundamental values.

18

Discipline and behaviour within schools are improved.

19

Schools will employ more people who understand the local community.

20

People will have more information that could help them choose a school.

21

Add your own statement

22

Add your own statement

23

Add your own statement

24

Add your own statement

Statement cards overview Photocopy this page.

Focus	Theme	Card sort statements
Student achievement	Improving student achievement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Children learn to become more responsible adults. Teachers understand more about where children come from and what motivates children. The curriculum will be more relevant for pupils. Teachers and parents can work together more closely and help pupils to achieve.
Schools as agencies for democracy	Making schools more accountable and increasing democratic involvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Schools will be accountable to their local community. Local people can have more of a say in important decisions about their schools. They can come together to plan for what they want for children. Young people have more opportunities to be involved in decisions about their lives. Children have a sense of belonging in their community.
Building social capital	Building social capital within communities by encouraging schools to collaborate to promote community well-being (eg healthier or safer communities)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Vandalism and anti-social behaviour among young people are reduced. The local area is safer, healthier and more attractive. Adults as well as children are encouraged to learn. Parents will feel included in their child's education.
Moral basis for society	Developing the role of schools as moral agents, promoting social justice and responsibility for youth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> They can work together to tackle racism and other forms of discrimination. Business, education and community leaders will have more chances to work together for the benefit of young people. Schools can do more to prepare new immigrant groups to take part in society. They can agree on fundamental values.
School self-interest	Promoting schools' self-interest through the development of good public relations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Discipline and behaviour within schools is improved. Schools will employ more people who understand the local community. People will have more information that could help them choose a school.

Source: Riley & Louis, 2004¹

¹ Riley, K, & Louis, K, 2004, *Exploring New Forms Of Community Leadership: Linking schools and communities to improve educational opportunities for young people*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership.

Creating community links – the activity in action...

Winsford Networked Learning Community

“ We need to focus on our pupils. ”

“ As well as schools making time for the community – the community needs to make time for schools. ”

“ Children must get the provision they need. ”

“ We should have stronger, not just traditional, community links which help inform decisions. ”

“ They are all our children wherever they go to school. ”

“ We need to get everyone talking – not just in leadership groups, and not just teachers and parents. ”

The context...

Winsford is a Networked Learning Community (NLC) in a small town – population 37,000 – in Cheshire, England. The NLC is made up of all the 17 schools in the town – two secondary schools with a shared 6th form, two special schools, nine primary, two junior and two infant schools. We began working collaboratively in 2000 and the challenge we face is to move from a network which was initially focused on school and organisational improvement and the raising of educational standards, to one which is much broader and aspires to community and school transformation, the building of social capital and a more holistic approach to both improving standards and achieving greater well-being for young people.

The action...

In November 2004, the town held its third In School Educational Development Day (INSED) with more than 450 representatives from all 17 schools, and more than 30 members of local community groups, other agencies, local councillors and local residents. At this event we provided opportunities for colleagues to share their experiences and aspirations for Winsford through the ‘Creating community links’ card sort activity. We used the 20 statements from the Louis & Riley (2004) research and added another five statements of our own about Winsford.

The outcomes...

Figure 1 shows that there was one overwhelming reason why participants in Winsford believed that schools and communities should be more closely linked, namely that childrens’ self-esteem would be improved and aspirations could be raised. This compelling reason to work and learn together came from Winsford’s own analysis of needs and aspirations.

Agreeing on a reason to work together is important. As research about networks indicates, having a compelling reason, a moral purpose, around which to unite, is critical for the successful development of the network.

Statement number five, which the network created and added, was most popular:

“ Schools and communities should be more closely linked so that...children’s self esteem will be improved and aspirations can be raised. ”

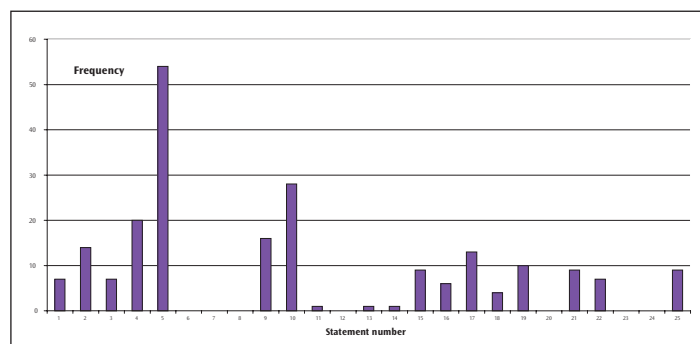


Figure 1: Showing the popularity of the statements placed in the top three by every group

What next...?

To ensure that community groups and other non-educational institutions are involved in the process of exploring the rationale for linking schools and communities within the network, community representatives who attended the INSED day are undertaking this card sort activity within their own organisations and there is ongoing consultation with local residents’ groups and children.

This activity, along with others, has helped to widen participation and provide opportunities to develop a common language about community leadership. We are beginning to build the leadership capacity to enable both those employed in schools and those living and working in the local communities to service and build capacity for interdependent relationships between institutions and communities beyond the school gates (Bond et al 2005)². In so doing, we are moving away from a culture of competition and towards a culture of collaboration within our networked learning community.

“ Schools and other agencies throughout the town can work together to ‘break the cycle’ and lose the negative image of the town. By doing this we hope that we, as educators, can bring education back to the child where it rightfully belongs. ” □

² Bond, K, Berry, H, Farrar, M, Godfrey, V & Ling, D, 2005, ‘Through the school gates; Community Leadership Network – more than an aspiration’, Paper presented to the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) conference, Barcelona, January and available on Learning Exchange Online at www.nlexchange.org.uk

Further information

You can find out more about this tool, the projects that initially created it and the research that underpins it at: **www.ncsl.org.uk** and following the links to community leadership.

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The 'What are we learning about...?' series is designed to make public the learning that has emerged from NLCs in the last two years.

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